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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that described the existing nature of school-based management (SBM) structures and procedures associated with school-development planning in Western Australia. It also examined the impact of SBM on the curriculum and professional activities of teachers. Data were obtained through analysis of official policy guidelines and school documents and a survey of 279 teaching staff from 12 secondary schools in Perth, Western Australia. Findings show that the administrative structures and processes in the schools were generally consistent with government policy guidelines. However, the structures and procedures had little effect on classroom practices at the school level. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents felt that participation in school-development planning informed and improved teaching and learning in the school. For almost 71 percent of the teachers, the documented plans bore little resemblance to actual classroom practices. In short, teachers did not perceive that SBM contributed positively to their schools' educational programs. Rather than coordinating the work of the school with the stated priorities of the education system, SBM appeared to have had the opposite effect. Unintended consequences included reduced time for curriculum planning and interdepartmental fragmentation. One table and one figure are included. (Contains 16 references.) (LMI)

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The Impact of School-based Management on Classroom Practice at the Secondary School-level.

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Background and Rationale

School improvement and school effectiveness have become a major concern of education authorities, policy makers, administrators and teachers seeking to reform existing education systems. In many education systems there has emerged a recognition that school-based decision-making and management has potential to bring improvement in the quality of education. Consequently, education systems in Australia, New Zealand, Western Europe, and the United States have undergone restructuring to establish "self-managing", "self-governing" or "self-determining schools. In Western Australia such restructuring has been undertaken using corporate managerialism (Hyslop, 1988). To some extent the change focus has been on management practices rather than focussing on the achieving of educational goals.

While it appears that school-based management has potential to create "Better Schools" there is little indication that such changes have had a positive impact on the teaching and learning process. Indeed, Rosenholtz (1987) and Corbett & Wilson (1990), identified a number of unintended consequences for teachers such as reduced motivation, morale, and collegial interaction all of which are counterproductive to improving curriculum practices.

For Fullan & Miles (1991), school improvement initiatives that focus on structural and organisational changes alone constitute a very limited strategy for successful change. Instead the authors suggest it is individuals and groups of individuals that need to alter their professional practices; their culture. In short the focus of school improvement efforts should be on facilitating change to teachers' perceptions, beliefs and practices concerning teaching and learning.

Fullan and Miles (1991), prompt a focus on a number of key issues concerning the impact of school restructuring on the professional practices of teachers. Issues related to curriculum practice, school organisation, and student outcomes. It is these issues that have emerged as central to the reform debate following significant restructuring of educational bureaucracies around Australia and form the focus of this research.

In addition to the impact of school restructuring on curriculum practices, there has emerged in Australia, Federal and State level pressure for a significant shift in the curriculum offered to upper secondary students. The recently released Report of the Australian Education Council Review entitled *Young*

People's Participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training (otherwise known as the Finn Report [1991]) endorses the view that schools need to change so that quality and quantity skills and knowledge can develop. At the state level, the proposed introduction of "Pathways" as a non-tertiary focused curriculum for upper school students is reflective of a similar pressure for a fundamental shift in secondary school curriculum offerings.

Clearly, schools and systems are facing major challenges in responding for change. Of fundamental concern then, appears to be the impact that such change is having on curriculum planning and classroom practices of teachers.

Research Approach and Methodology

The purpose of this research was twofold. First, to identify and describe the existing nature of the school-based management, in particular the structures and procedures associated with school development planning in Western Australia. Second, to examine the impact school-based management was having on the curriculum and professional activities of teachers.

The first phase of the research involved document analysis of policy guidelines issued by the Central Office of the Department of Education. These guidelines covered three specific yet interrelated aspects of school-based management, namely School-based Decision-making Groups, School Development Plans, and School Accountability. Each document provided a statement of rationale together with specific policy statements concerning the substance of specific change that was necessary to establish school-based management. In addition to the "official policy guidelines" documents detailing individual school-level response to the policies were examined. While variation concerning structure and procedure was evident across sites, all schools had in place forms of school-based management consistent with the Department of Education policies.

The second phase of the research involved the development and administration of a School Development Planning and Classroom Practice Questionnaire (SDPCPQ) in twelve senior secondary schools drawn from the twelve metropolitan education districts in Western Australia.

Dimensions included in the questionnaire were derived from the policy documents on school-based management issued by the Department of

Education to all schools in Western Australia. The resulting dimensions included whole-school/development planning, program translation, in-class activities, collegiality, accountability, student learning outcomes and resource deployment. Within each dimension items were written, grouped and then checked to ensure a comprehensive coverage of the dimension. Each set of items was next reviewed by a number of researchers who had previously developed or used similar instruments in secondary schools. The questionnaire field-tested by a sample of 16 secondary school teachers drawn from two different schools then redrafted accordingly.

Dimension	Item Nº	Sample Items
Development Planning	4.	At this school, individual teachers can exert influence over the decisions contained within the school Development Plan.
	5.	Classroom teachers have limited participation in the design of strategies to ensure school priorities are achieved.
Program Translation	8.	Frequent group and staff planning sessions are critical in translating school priorities into teaching plans and programs.
	29.	In my teaching area, teachers use stated school priorities and indicators as a basis for programming at the classroom level.
In-Class Activities	14.	There is often a difference between what is contained in the Development Plan and what actually occurs in the classroom.
	30.	When selecting and implementing particular classroom **activities** teachers in my teaching area seldom consider the indicators or strategies contained in the school Development Plan.
Collegiality	19.	At this school, teachers from a range of teaching areas, collaborate in the design of whole-school curriculum programs.
	32.	In my teaching area there is limited collaboration **between** teachers in the design of common teaching programs.

Dimension	Item Nº	Sample Items

Accountability	12.	Teachers' short term planning needs to be regularly reviewed to ensure their compatibility with the school Development Plan.
	21.	At this school, the review of teaching programs is undertaken as an integral part of the school development planning process.
Learning Outcomes	15	It is difficult to effectively monitor learning outcomes by using the indicator statements contained in Development Plan.
	31.	In my teaching area, the assessment of student achievement is directly linked to the indicator statements contained in the school Development Plan.
Resourcing	24.	Teachers need additional time and resources to help them align their teaching programs with the school Development Plan.
	25.	This school uses cost effectiveness criteria to help determine whether new programs should be introduced or existing programs should continue.

The final version of the instrument contains 38 items. Each item has a five-point Likert format with responses of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Uncertain (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Of the 38 items approximately half were scored in reverse. To establish a sample representative of urban high schools, the questionnaire was administered in 12 secondary schools, one drawn from each of the twelve metropolitan school districts in Perth Western Australia. All teaching staff involved in the four core discipline areas of Mathematics, Science, English, and Social Science were targeted in the sample (n=279). The resulting data enabled analysis using SPSSx at whole-school as well as across all schools in the sample. Individual school reports were prepared and presented to participating schools in return for their cooperation in the research. For the purposes of this paper the five point Likert scale was collapsed to a three point scale and data analysed for all schools in the study. It is the findings derived from this analysis that forms the basis of the discussion that now follows.

Findings and Discussion

The Nature of School based Management

Central to the restructuring endeavours in Western Australia has been the establishment of school decision-making groups (SDMG's). These groups serve as the basis of an approach to school-based management that permits school staff and community representatives to exercise more autonomy over decisions concerning educational policy and school development. The central responsibility of the SDMG is establishing a management plan that relates directly to Education Department and school policies and priorities. This management plan has been variously referred to as the School Improvement Plan, the School Strategic Plan and the School Development Plan. The plan is intended to articulate both central office and school level policy through statements of purpose, priority and the establishment of specific strategies for the implementation and review of the plan. Associated with the development plan are mechanisms for resource allocation and accountability within the school.

In many respects the structures and procedures associated with this school-based management approach are intended to coordinate and align the work of the school with the stated priorities of the education system. Such a function reflects an assumption that secondary schools are "loosely coupled systems" (March and Olsen 1976; Weick, 1976) That is, the school organisation lacks co-ordination within the various sub-systems that constitute the organisation. For Firestone (1985) and for Wilson & Dickson Corbett, (1983) this was especially so with respect to co-ordination between the administrative sub-system and the pedagogic sub-system, (that system concerned with teaching and instructional activities). In support, Deal and Celotti (1980) argued that due to such loose coupling, the formal organisation and the administration of the school do not significantly affect methods of classroom instruction. That is, teachers in their classrooms function largely independently from the administration of the school. Deal and Celotti (1980) suggested that the lack of linkage between these two domains might explain why the greatest part of organisationally planned change targeted at teaching and learning is seldom implemented, and the greatest part of change in teaching and learning is not organisationally planned.

In order to create "Better Schools" linkage between these domains or sub-systems need to be enhanced. The site-based management procedures associated with school development planning attempts to align these sub-systems. When functioning as intended what happens in the classroom will be

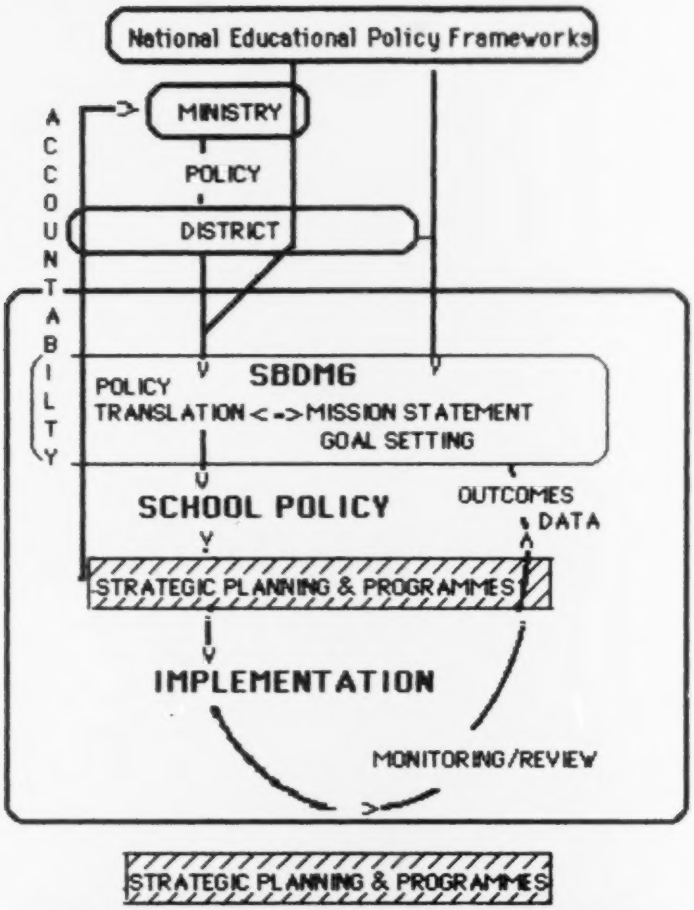
informed by and related to the elements of the school development plan. For example, many of the schools in the study had specific policy relating to literacy across the school curriculum. In the school development plan, the policy was translated into specific strategies, resource allocation and accompanying indicators for determining school-wide success. This whole-school plan of action required each teaching area to incorporate within their teaching programs related strategies that reflected the school priority of literacy. Indeed many teaching programs contained elements that reflected the school priority on literacy, however, teachers indicated that these programs existed chiefly to satisfy accountability procedures and had little influence classroom practice.

Analysis of policy documents and development plans obtained in all 12 schools indicated that while there is some variation, each school has established school decision-making group that permits school staff and community representatives to translate Central Office educational policy and develop school level policy. Similarly all schools undertake development planning in a manner that conforms to the Central Office framework (School Development Plans; Policy and Guidelines, 1989), and incorporates policy guidelines for resource allocation and accountability procedures. However, it is important to note that in all but three cases the school decision-making group did not have responsibility for the formulation of the school development plan. This was undertaken by a separate committee composed of school staff and frequently referred to as the "education committee". Where an "Education Committee" existed, the school decision-making group served to review and ratify the development plan rather that to formulate policy or devise strategies for meeting school priorities.

Based on the documentation concerning the decision-making and planning structures and procedures existing in the school sample a synthesis diagram was constructed. The decision-making and planning procedures typical across sites are represented in figure 1:

Figure 1

School Development Planning



The figure indicates the press for policy response at the school level stems from three different sources. Two sources are external to the school; namely the Federal and state government via the District Offices of Education, with the third press having its origins within the immediate school community itself. In each case the school decision-making group (SDMG) translates policy against situational knowledge and an understanding of the prevailing culture of the school. In this manner it accommodated Federal government and system level priorities and generates school level policy. The resultant school-level policy informs the strategic planning and programming process through the development of statements of purpose, priority and the establishment of specific strategies for the implementation and review of the plan. It is the classroom practitioners who have responsibility for implementation of the

strategies and for undertaking review and evaluation. The data collected through the review and evaluation is intended to form the basis of ongoing planning and serves for school-wide and system level accountability.

The Impact of School Based Management on the Teacher

For the purposes of analysis of the impact of school based management on teaching, items comprising the School Development Planning and Classroom Practice Questionnaire were grouped around the seven dimensions contained in the SDPCPQ (see Table 1). Responses for dimension were examined and item and dimension summaries written.

The first dimension sought response to the structures and procedures for school based management; specifically teacher participation in policy decision-making and school development planning. Data give clear indication that school-based management has afforded teaching staff the opportunity to participate in whole-school planning. Indeed over 58% of those sampled agreed that there was opportunity to set school priorities and educational objectives. However, only less than 44% felt that classroom teachers held influence over planning decisions and the school level. Taken together the responses suggest that increased participation in school management does not necessarily equate to influence over decision outcomes, nor translate into improved performance at the classroom level by participants. (Levine and Eubanks, 1992).

The second dimension sought response to the impact the substance of the school development plan has on teacher planning. The items for this dimension can divided into two categories. The first sought response to the desirability of aligning teaching programs with stated school priorities and objectives. The second category sought to assess the extent to which such alignment was a reality under a school based management regime. Data indicate that 62% of respondents felt frequent group and staff planning sessions were critical in translating school priorities into teaching plans and programs. A further 88% agreed that clearly stated sets of strategies were necessary for implementing action plans contained in the school development plan. However, in reality there is weak linkage between school development plans and actual curriculum planing and practice. For 55% of respondents, stated school priorities and indicators (objectives) were not used as a basis for classroom level programming. According to 87% of respondents, it was

syllabus documents of their particular discipline rather than the school plan guided curriculum decisions.

The third dimension sought response to assess the impact of school based management on "actual" in-class activities. In short, the items for this dimension focused on the extent to which aspects of the school development plan guided and influenced the teaching/ learning interactions. Over 70% of respondents indicated that there was a difference between what was contained in the school development plan and what actually occurred in classrooms. For these teachers they perceived little linkage between the stated intensions of the development plan and actual classroom practice. A clear majority of teachers did not refer to the school development plan when setting learning objectives or selecting teaching strategies. Instead, as indicated by 73% of respondents, decisions concerning classroom interactions and the management of learning were based on discussions with colleagues.

The fourth dimension concerned the promotion of collegiality through school-based management procedures such as participatory decision-making and cross department collaboration. Data indicated that "Balkanization" of departments (Hargreaves, & Macmillian, 1990) continues to be a feature of secondary schools. Collegiality at the teaching area level was strongly indicated concerning collaboration in the design of common teaching programs, However, collaboration on whole-school programs did not appear to be so strong. Some 53% of respondents agreed that teachers from different teaching areas seldom collaborated in the design of cross-disciplinary teaching programs. For these respondents, involvement in a range of committees associated with school-based management amounted to the type of *contrived collegiality* discussed by Hargreaves and Wignall (1989).

The anomaly between policy and reality was also apparent in responses to items concerned with the fifth dimension, that of teacher accountability. Accountability forms a central feature of school-based management within all Western Australian Schools. Across the sample there was a common belief that teachers need to be accountable for their work. A majority of respondents (53.7%) indicated that individuals teaching programs need to be reviewed to ensure compatibility with the school development plan. Further, there was agreement (52%) that the process on translating school priorities and designing teaching programs should be *supervised* and not be left to the individual

teacher. However, in reality only 23.5% of respondents indicated that review and accountability mechanisms linked to the development plan existed in their schools. In addition only 11% of respondents agreed that indicator statements contained in the school development plan were used by teachers for self-evaluation.

The sixth dimension sought response to the use of student learning outcomes as a means of informing and directing school-based planning. Across all schools, the monitoring procedures employ indicator statements based on student learning outcomes as criteria for evaluating program and teacher effectiveness. Accordingly, items concerning the relationship between indicator statements contained in the school development plan and evaluation procedures were included in the questionnaire. While 55% of respondents felt it was difficult to effectively monitor learning outcomes by using the indicator statement contained in the development plan, over 60% disagreed that evaluation of student achievement was directly linked to indicator statements.

The process of school-based management involves control over the allocation of resources within the school. The seventh dimension therefore focused on the perceptions of teachers on the procedures associated with resourcing. Implied in the policy documents guiding school-based management is that some form of cost-effectiveness criteria should be employed as a basis of such resource allocation within the school. However, for 41% of respondents these criteria were not made explicit. While as majority 54% of respondents indicated sufficient resourcing to enable effective teaching and learning to take place, 82% felt that their teaching area could not undergo a reduction in resourcing and still be effective. Given the number of changes associated with school based management it was of little surprise that 86.8% of respondents felt teachers needed additional time and resources to help them align their teaching with stated goals and objectives contained within the school development plan.

Concluding Comments

In Western Australia the establishment of school-based management has been carefully controlled by Government Policy guidelines that have mandated the adoption and implementation of particular structures and procedures at the school-site level. It was therefore not surprising that the administrative arrangements and processes employed in each of the schools under study were remarkably similar. Each school has established school decision-making group that permits school staff and community representatives to translate Central Office educational policy and develop school level policy. Similarly all schools undertake strategic planning in a manner that conforms to the Central Office framework for school development plans. These plans are intended to direct the work of the school and must include: a mission statement, Central Office priorities, School-Level Priorities, strategies for addressing the priorities, performance indicators, details of how the school will allocate its resources and monitor its performance in the achievement of the stated priorities. (School Development Plans: Policy and Guidelines, 1989). As mooted by Fullan & Miles (1991), data clearly indicate that structures and procedures associated with school based management are thus far having little effect on the classroom practice at the secondary school level. Indeed, only 29% of those surveyed felt that participation in school development planning informed and improved teaching and learning in the school. Further, for 70.5% of respondents, the documented plans bore little resemblance to what actually happened in the classroom. In short, teachers do not perceive that school based management is contributing positively to the educational program at their school.

With respect to the impact school development plans on informing teacher planning a clear majority of teachers (60%) indicated they did not use key elements of the development plan (such as priority or indicator statements) to program at the classroom level. Similarly, 51% did not uses whole-school data about student performance to make adjustments to their teaching programs. Instead 86.8% of teachers continue to use syllabus documents rather than the development plan when making curriculum decisions and 73.3% of respondents used discussions with colleagues as a basis for ideas about teaching strategies and learning objectives, not the school development plan. Rather that increasing the co-ordination and alignment of the work of the school with the stated priorities of the education system school-based management approaches in Western Australia appear to have had the opposite effect.

As indicated by Corbett & Wilson (1990), Hargreaves & Macmillan (1992) and others, there appears unintended and somewhat negative consequences to the establishment of school-based management. Data show 76% of respondents felt that as a direct consequence of school-based management there has been a reduction in time that teachers can spend on curriculum planning. In addition, rather than facilitate intended interdepartmental collaboration, school-based management appears to have triggered further discipline area "balkanization" along with an increase in work pressure and decreased teacher motivation.

The challenge for policy architects and change managers concerned with effecting school improvement is to develop strategies that focus more on transforming teaching and learning (Rallis, 1990), than on implementing corporate managerialism approaches with a focus on management and strategic planning.

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